

Sudan press conference draws fire

by Bonnie James

A Schiller Institute press conference in Washington, D.C. March 20, titled, "American Legislators Report on their Fact-Finding Visit to Sudan," immediately drew fire from the British-run lobby against Sudan. More than 40 representatives of the press, foreign embassies, and Washington-based think-tanks attended the event at the National Press Club. Among those present were the embassies of the Netherlands, Yemen, Algeria, Zambia, and Sudan; CBN News (Pat Robertson's network), which filmed the event; Voice of America; UNI Radio News, *Saudi Press*, the *Baltimore Sun*, *Middle East News*, and a Russian journalist. Among the organizations present were the Arab League, the United Association for Studies and Research, and the Southern Sudan Research Center (a Washington-based front for Sudan's "Rent-a-rebel" John Garang).

Speaking for the Schiller Institute and its two fact-finding delegations that visited Sudan, once in September 1996, and again in late February 1997, were Lawrence Freeman, who accompanied both delegations; the Hon. Theo Mitchell, former South Carolina State Senator; and Maria Elena Milton, former Democratic candidate for Congress from Arizona's 4th C.D., both of whom took part in the February mission to Sudan. In addition, two delegation members who had traveled to Sudan last September were present: Rep. James Mann, former congressman from South Carolina; and Alabama State Rep. Thomas E. Jackson. Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, a leader of the Institute's European branch, who accompanied the February delegation, was unable to attend the press conference.

Introducing the Schiller Institute delegation, Freeman explained that the decision to send a mission to Sudan was taken because "we recognized that a very nasty operation was being run to destabilize the nation of Sudan," through massive lies in the media, which "unfortunately are listened to in Washington." He noted that members of both delegations had meetings with numerous members of Congress to report on their findings.

'Find out for yourself'

Freeman pointed out that no U.S. elected officials are going to Sudan, because they have accepted the lies in the media about slavery, harboring of terrorists, and persecution of Christians and other non-Muslim populations. These lies, he said, have also been spread by an organization called Chris-

tian Solidarity International (CSI), which is directed by a member of the British House of Lords, Baroness Caroline Cox. Freeman invited members of the press and others to "go to Sudan, and find out yourself" what the truth is.

Sen. Theo Mitchell spoke next, and began by commending the Schiller Institute for sponsoring such a humanitarian venture, in defense of a nation, Sudan, which was being "put to the sword" by powerful interests. After describing in detail the itinerary of the February mission, Mitchell reported that the group had found no institutionalized, government-backed slavery; in fact, he said, slavery in Sudan is a capital offense. Rather, Mitchell asserted, Sudan had been victimized, by an invasion from Ethiopia and Eritrea into its southern region, beginning Jan. 12.

The invading forces took four towns, he said. "They came across the border *en masse*, using the latest, advanced weapons of war, leaving some 600 dead, leaving the bodies to rot, taking captives—old women, children . . . forcing people to sit in one place for three days without moving, sitting in their own urine and excrement. They machine-gunned women, raped women. . . ."

Sen. Mitchell made it clear that the Schiller delegation had been free to select those places it wished to visit, and the people with whom it wished to meet. He reported on numerous meetings the delegation held with clergy of all faiths, political leaders at all levels, lay people, and ordinary citizens, and he stated that the delegation found absolutely no evidence to support any of the charges, including reports that Christian boys were being kidnapped and forced to become Muslims. "We found none of that," he said.

In fact, Mitchell stated, it was clear that charges of slavery and persecution were aimed especially at African-Americans, including the Black Congressional Caucus. "We have invited them, as well as you . . . to go there. Find out for yourself," he challenged the audience.

A 'remarkably friendly country'

Rep. James Mann concentrated his comments on the nasty role played by the press in spreading disinformation about Sudan, which he said he found to be "a remarkably friendly country." Mann, who is white, commented that nowhere in the African nation did he ever see a "hostile look"—a statement, he said, which he could not make about his home state of South Carolina! He excoriated the two *Baltimore Sun* reporters (one of whom attended the press conference), for basing their charges of slavery in Sudan, on an obvious set-up, orchestrated by their sponsor, Lady Caroline Cox.

That story, he said, "wreaked havoc in the world, in Sudan, in the Black Caucus . . . resulting in the approval of sanctions by the United States and the United Nations."

"Never in my career, have I seen such terrible consequences because of inadequate reporting," he stated.

The soft-spoken Rep. Thomas Jackson of Alabama gave

his report next. He admitted that he knew nothing about Sudan until he began reading newspaper accounts of slavery there. "My fore-parents had to endure the atrocity of slavery. . . . I was troubled; I was angry when I read that there were slaves . . . Arabs who held black slaves." When Jackson arrived in Sudan last September with the Schiller delegation, he was surprised that the Khartoum government told them to go out and investigate on their own. "The Ministry of Justice opened up the whole country to us," he said.

"I visited three churches in Khartoum, one in southern Sudan. No bishop, no elder, or pastor knew of any slavery, or captives of war sold as slaves.

Jackson then denounced the *Baltimore Sun* reporters, whose story has defamed the Sudanese government and people. "The *Sun* reporters, orchestrated by CSI, Caroline Cox, a member of the House of Lords, snuck into the country, immediately found a 'slave camp.' . . . It *had* to be orchestrated!"

Speaking last, Maria Elena Milton focussed on the method employed to manipulate specific sectors of the population: How do you "whip up" Americans?" she asked. Well, she said, we have a population of African-Americans. Bait them with the issue of slavery. There can be no other purpose to the widespread reports of slavery in Sudan, she said, *since we found no institutional support for slavery!*

How do you mobilize American conservatives? Milton asked. Whip them up with charges of Islamic fundamentalist oppression of Christians—fed through CSI, and the Christian Coalition. Pat Robertson is raising a lot of money using this issue, she pointed out.

As soon as the floor was opened to questions, it became evident that the Cox networks had been mobilized for this event. Moses Akol of the Southern Sudan Resource Center (SSRC) jumped out of his chair, insisting that the delegations' findings were suspect, because they had failed to travel to Bahr-el-ghazel—apparently the only place in Sudan where slavery could be found! Akol and the SSRC work closely with the anti-Sudan lobby of F. Deng of the Brookings Institution, and with Cox's CSI.

A journalist from the Voice of America network, Elmigdad Gebril, then objected to the fact that the Schiller delegation had failed to investigate "human rights violations" among "political prisoners," in Sudan. Gebril is from Sudan's north, and is part of the political opposition to the government in Khartoum. Perhaps that is why he did not seem concerned about the invasion of his nation by foreign governments, controlled from London.

Gregory Kane, one of the two *Baltimore Sun* reporters responsible for starting the tidal wave of attacks against Sudan, with their fairy tale about slavery there, echoed Akol's charges that the Schiller Institute delegation had failed to visit the one location where they would have found slavery. Yet, at a Carnegie Endowment meeting last fall, Kane and his



Former U.S. Congressman James Mann said, in reference to the *Baltimore Sun*'s accusations of slavery in Sudan, "Never in my career, have I seen such terrible consequences because of inadequate reporting."

colleague, Gil Lewthwaite, were forced to admit that the slave-master from whom they had "bought" a slave, was so terrified that he would not give his name, because, he said, that if the government were to find out, he would be executed. Nevertheless, Kane and Lewthwaite both claimed that the Sudanese government is "turning a blind eye" to slavery.

Lawrence Freeman then invited Kane to accompany him on a visit to Sudan to prove to himself that there is no truth to these malicious charges. Freeman attacked Kane for "sneaking across the border," without a visa, thus violating Sudan's sovereignty. "We all know that the major problem in Africa is that its nations have not been allowed to develop as sovereign nation-states," he stated. "You crossed their border without a visa. Cox did so seven times." This demonstrates contempt for Sudan's sovereignty, Freeman said.

When Kane claimed that he would not have received a visa from the Khartoum government, Freeman exposed this as fraudulent: The Sudanese Ambassador has personally invited both *Baltimore Sun* reporters to come to Sudan and investigate for themselves, with no restriction, Freeman said. They had declined the invitation allegedly because the ambassador could not guarantee that they would be able to meet the President of Sudan personally!